

MENGAP, THE SONG OF THE DYAK  
HEAD FEAST,

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*Read at a Meeting of the Society held on the 8th of July 1878.*

THE principal ceremonial feasts of Sea Dyaks are connected with three subjects; farming, head-taking, and the dead; and are called by them respectively, Gawè Batu or Gawè Benih, Gawè Pala or Burong, and Gawè Antu; the Stone or Seed feast, the Head or Bird feast, and the Spirit feast. The first mentioned are two distinct feasts and not two names of one; but both refer to the farm. It is with the Gawè Pala or Burong that this paper is concerned.

When a house has obtained a human head a grand feast must be made sooner or later to celebrate the acquisition; and this is by no means a mere matter of eating and drinking, although there is an excess of the latter, but is a matter of much ceremony, of offerings and of song. The song which is then recited is well-known to differ considerably in form from the ordinary language, and the European who may be able to understand and to speak colloquial Dyak may yet find the "Mengap" (as it is called in Saribus dialect) mostly unintelligible. But I believe the difference is only that between a poetical and prose language. Certain requirements of alliteration and of rhythm and rhyme have to be fulfilled, which, together with native metaphor and most excessive verbosity, are quite sufficient to mystify an uneducated hearer. Another reason for the difference lies in the fact that the language of the Mengap remains stationary, whilst the ordinary spoken language is continually changing and developing new forms. But the object of this paper is not to discourse about Dyak poetical language, I only attempt to give a sketch of the Mengap of the Head-feast, so that the reader may have some idea of the meaning of what has perhaps sounded to some a mere senseless rigmarole.

In Dyak life the sense of the invisible is constantly present and active. Spirits and goblins are to them as real as themselves. And this is specially true of these ceremonial feasts. In the feasts for the dead the spirits of Hades are invoked; in those connected with farming Pulang Gana, who is supposed to reside somewhere under the ground, is called upon; and in the Head-feast it is Singalang Burong who is invoked to be present. He may be described as the Mars of Sea Dyak mythology, and is put far away above the skies. But the invocation is not made by the human performer in the manner of a prayer direct to this great being; it takes the form of a story setting forth how the mythical hero Kling or Klieng made a Head-feast and fetched Singalang Burong to it. This Kling about whom there are many fables is a spirit, and is supposed to live somewhere or other not far from mankind, and to be able to confer benefits upon them. The Dyak performer or performers then, as they walk up and down the long verandah of the house singing the Mengap, in reality describe Kling's Gawè Pala, and how Singalang Burong was invited and came. In thought the Dyaks identify themselves with Kling, and the resultant signification is that the recitation of this story is an invocation to Singalang Burong, who is supposed to come not to Kling's house only, but to the actual Dyak house where the feast is celebrated; and he is received by a particular ceremony, and is offered food or sacrifice.

The performer begins by describing how the people in Kling's house contemplate the heavens in their various characters:—

“They see to the end of heaven like a well-joined box.”

“They see the speckled evening clouds like a menaga jar ‘in fullness of beauty.’”

“They see the sun already descending to the twinkling ‘expanse of ocean.’”

They see “the threatening clouds like an expanse of black cloth;” “the brightly shining moon;” “the stars and milky way;” and then the house with its inmates, the “crowned young men;” and “hiding women” in high glee, and grave old men sitting on the verandah—all preparing for high festival. The women are described decorating the house with native cloths; one is compared to a dove, another to an argus pheasant, another to a minah bird—all laughing with pleasure. All the ancient Dyak chiefs and Malay

chiefs are called upon in the song to attend, and even the spirits in Hades; and last of all Singalang Burong. To him henceforward the song is almost entirely confined.

We must suppose the scene to be laid in Kling's house. Kumang, Kling's wife, the ideal of Dyak feminine beauty, comes out of the room and sits down on the verandah beside her husband, and complains that the festival preparations make slow progress. She declares she has no comfort either in standing, sitting or lying down on account of this slackness; and by way of rousing her spouse to activity, says the festival preparations had better be put a stop to altogether. But Kling will never have it said that he began but could not finish.

Indah keba aku nunggu,  
Nda kala aku pulai lebu,  
Makau benong tajau bujang.

Indah keba aku ngaiyau,  
Nda kala aku pulai sabau,  
Makau slabit ladong penyariang.

Indah keba aku meti,  
Nda kala aku nda mai,  
Bulih kalimpai babi blang.

Indah keba aku manjok,  
Nda kala aku pulai luchok,  
Bulih sa-langgai ruai lalang.

Kitè bisi tegar nda besampiar untak tulang.  
Kitè bisi laju ari peluru leka bangkong,  
Kitè bisi lasit ari sumpit betibong punggang,  
Sampurè nya kitè asoh betuboh ngambi ngabang.

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“ When I have gone to fine people,  
“ Never did I return empty handed  
“ Bringing jars with me.

“ When I have gone on the war-path,  
“ Never did I return unsuccessful  
“ Bringing a basketful of heads.

“ When I have gone to lay pig-traps,  
“ Never did I return without  
“ Obtaining a bear's tusk.

“ When I have set bird snares.  
“ Never did I return unfruitful  
“ Getting an argus pheasant.

- “ We have a strong one, the marrow of whose bones  
never wastes.  
“ We have one swifter than a bullet of molten lead.  
“ We have one more piercing than the sumpitan with  
ringed endings.  
“ Sampurè we will order to gather companions and  
fetch the guests to the feast.”

So Sampurè is ordered to fetch Singalang Burong who lives on the top of a hill called “Sandong Tenyalang.” But Sampurè begs to be excused on account of illness; upon which *Kasulai* (the moth) and *Laiang* (the swallow) offer themselves for the work, with much boasting of their activity and swiftness. With one bound they can clear the space between the earth and the “clouds crossing the skies.” So they speed on their way. Midway to the skies they come to the house of “Ini Manang,” (Grandmother Doctor) who asks the meaning of their hurried arrival covered with dirt and perspiration. “Who is sick of the fever? Who is at the point of death? I have no time to go down to doctor them.”

Agi lelak aku uchu  
Baru pulai ari tuchong langgong Sanyandang  
Di-injau Umang  
Betebang batang pisang raia.

- “ I am still weary, O grandchild,  
“ Am just come back from plain-topped Sanyandang;  
“ Having been borrowed by Umang  
“ To cut down the grand plantain tree.”\*

They answer that they are not come to ask her to exercise her medical skill, but simply to inquire how far it is to the country of Salulut Antu Ribut, (the spirit of the winds.) Ini Manang joking gives them this mystifying direction. “If you start early in the dark morning you will be a night on the way. If you start this evening you will get there at once.” Whether this reply helped them or not they get to their destination at last; and the Wind Spirit accosts them.

- Nama siduai agi bepetang, agi malam?  
Bangat bepagi belum-lam?  
Dini bala bisi ngunja menoa?  
Dini antu ti begugu nda jena baka?  
“ Why come you while it is still dark, still night?  
“ So very early in the dawn of morning?  
“ Where is there a hostile army invading the country?  
“ Where are there thundering spirits in countless  
numbers?”

\* This refers to a particular performance of the Dyak Manangs, i. e. Medicine men.

They assure her they bring no evil tidings; and they tell her they have been sent to fetch Singalang Burong, and desire her assistance in the matter. Here I may give a specimen of the verbosity of these recitations. Kasulai and Laiang wish to borrow Antu Ribut to,

Nyingkau Lang Tabunau  
 Ka Turau baroh remang.  
 Nempalong Singalang Burong  
 Di tuchong Sandong Tenyalang.  
 Nyeru aki Menaul Jugu  
 Ka munggu Nempurong Balang  
 Nanya ka Aki Lang Rimba  
 Ka Lembaba langit Lemengang,  
 Mesan ka aki Lang Buban  
 Di dan Kara Kijang.

“Reach up to Lang Tabunau  
 “At Turau below the clouds.  
 “Strike out to Singalang Burong.  
 “On the top of Sandong Tenyalang,  
 “Call to grandfather Menaul Jugu  
 “On Nempurong Balang hill.  
 “Ask for grandfather Lang Rimba  
 “At Lembaba in the mysterious heavens.  
 “Send for grandfather Lang Buban  
 “On the branch of the Kara Kijang.”

These, five beings described as living at five different places all refer to Singalang Burong, who is thus called by many names in order to magnify his greatness, to lengthen the story and fill up time. This is a general feature of all “Mengap.” But to go on with the story: Kasulai and Laiang desire Antu Ribut to take the message on because they would not be able to get through “pintu langit” (the door of heaven), whereas she, being wind, would have no difficulty. She could get through the smallest of cracks. At first she objects on the plea of being busy. “She is busy blowing through the steep valleys cut out like boats, blowing the leaves and scattering the dust.” However at length they prevail upon her, they return and she goes forward: but first she goes up a high tree where she changes her form, drops her personality as a spirit, and becomes natural wind. Upon this everywhere throughout the jungle there arises the sound of mighty rushing wind “like the thunder of a moon-mad waterfall.” Everywhere is the sound of driving wind and of falling leaves. She blows in all quarters.

Muput ka langit ngilah bulan  
 Muput ka ili ngilah Santan,  
 Muput ka dalam ai ngilah karangan,

Muput ka tanah ngilah sabaian,  
 Muput ka langit ntilang remang,  
 Nyelipak remang rarat,  
 Baka singkap krang kapaiyang,  
 Nyelepak pintu remang burak,  
 Baka pantak peti bejuang,  
 Menselit pintu langit,  
 Baka tambit peti tetukang.  
 Nelian lobang ujan  
 Teman gren laja pematang.  
 Mampul lobang guntor  
 Ti mupur inggar betinggang.  
 Nyelapat lobang kilat  
 Jampat nyelambai petang.

The above describes how Antu Ribut blew everywhere,

- “ She blows to heavenward beyond the moon.
- “ She blows to seaward beyond the Cocanut isle.
- “ She blows in the waters beyond the pebbly bottom.
- “ She blows to earthward beyond Hades.
- “ She blows to the skies below the clouds.
- “ She creeps between the drifting clouds,
- “ Which are like pieces of sliced kapaiyang. †
- “ She pushes through the door of the white flocked clouds,
- “ Marked as with nails of a cross-beamed box.
- “ She edges her passage through the door of heaven,
- “ Closed up like a box with opening cover.
- “ She slips through the rain holes,
- “ No bigger than the size of a sumpitan arrow.
- “ She enters the openings of the thunders,
- “ With roarings loud rushing one upon another.
- “ She shoots through the way of the lightning
- “ Which swiftly darts at night.”

And moreover she blows upon all the fruit trees in succession making them to bear unwonted fruit. And so with sounds of thunder and tempest she speeds on her errand to the farthest heaven.

Now amongst Singalang Burong's slaves is a certain Bujang Pedang (Young Sword) who happens to be clearing and weeding the “*sebang*” bushes as Antu Ribut passes, and he is utterly astounded at the noise. He looks heavenward and earthward and seaward but can see nothing to account for it. On comes the tempest; he is confounded, loses heart and runs away, leaving half his things behind him. He falls against the stumps and the buttresses of the trees and against the logs in the way, and comes tumbling, trembling, and bruised to the house of his mistress.

Sudan Berinjan Bungkong  
 Dara Tiong Menyelong,

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† A kind of fruit.

which is the poetical name of Singalang Burong's wife. He falls down exhausted on the verandah and faints away. His mistress laments over her faithful slave; but after a time he revives, and they ask him what frightened him so dreadfully, suggesting it may have been the rush of the flood tide, or the waves of the sea. No, he says, he has fought with enemies at sea, and striven with waves, but never heard anything so awesome before. Singalang Burong himself now appears on the scene, and being at a loss to account for the fright simply calls Bujang Pedang a liar, and a prating coward. Whilst they are engaged in discussion Antu Ribut arrives, and striking violently against the house shakes it to its foundations. Bujang Pedang recognizes the sound and tells them it was that he heard under the "*sebang*" bushes. The trees of the jungle bend to the tempest, coconut and sago trees are broken in two, pinang trees fall, and various fruit trees die by the stroke of the wind; but it makes other fruit trees suddenly put forth abundant fruit.

Muput Antu Ribut unggai badu badu.  
Mangka ka buah unggai leju leju.

"The Wind Spirit blows and will not cease, cease,  
"Strikes against the fruit trees and will not weary, weary."

Everybody becomes suddenly cold and great consternation prevails. Singalang Burong himself is roused, and demands in loud and angry tones who has broken any "*pemali*" (taboo), and so brought a plague of wind and rain upon the country. He declares he will sell them, or fight them, or punish them whoever they may be. He then resorts to certain charms to charm away the evil, such as burning some tuba root and other things. In the meantime Antu Ribut herself goes up to the house, but at the top of the ladder she stops short. She is afraid of Singalang Burong whom she sees in full war-costume, with arms complete and his war-charms tied round his waist; and going down the ladder again she goes round to the back of the house, and slips through the window in the roof into the room where Singalang Burong's wife sits at her weaving. Suddenly all her weaving materials are seen flying in all directions, she herself is frightened and takes refuge behind a post; but when she has recovered her presence of mind and collected her scattered articles, it dawns upon her (how does not appear) that this Wind is a messenger from the lower world, bringing an announcement that "men are killing the white spotted pig." Now she entertains Antu Ribut in the style of a great chief, and calls to her husband; but he heeds not,

Nda nyaut sa-leka mukut,  
Nda nimbas sa-leka bras.

“Does not answer a grain of bran,  
“Does not reply a grain of rice,”

(that is to the extent of a grain, &c.) The lady is displeased and declares she would rather be divorced from him than be treated in that way. This brings Singalang Burong into the room which is described as

Bilik baik baka tasik ledong lelinang.

“A room rich like the wide expanse of glistening sea.”

It appears that Antu Ribut does not speak and tell the purport of her message, for they still have to find it out for themselves, which they do by taking a “*tropong*,”\* (telescope) to see what is going on in the lower regions. They see the festival preparations there, the drums and gongs, and thus they understand that they are invited to the feast.

Before Singalang Burong can start he must call from the jungle his sons-in-law, who are the sacred birds which the Dyaks use as omens. These are considered both as spirits and as actual birds, for they speak like men and fly like birds. Here will be observed the reason why the festival is called Gawè Burong (Bird feast). Singalang Burong the war-spirit is also the chief of the omen birds. The hawk with brown body and white head and breast, very common in this country, is supposed to be a kind of outward personification of him, and probably the king of birds in Dyak estimation. The story of the feast centres in him and the inferior birds who all come to it; hence the title Gawè Burong. To call these feathered sons-in-law of Singalang Burong together the big old gong of the ancients is beaten, at the sound of which all the birds immediately repair to the house of their father-in-law, where they are told that Antu Ribut has brought an invitation to a feast in the lower world. So they all get ready and are about to start, when it comes out that Dara Inchin Temaga, one of Singalang Burong's daughters and the wife of the bird Katupong, refuses to go with them. On being questioned why she refuses, she declares that unless she obtains a certain precious ornament she will remain at home. She is afraid that at the feast she will appear less splendidly attired than the ladies Kumang, and Lulong, and Indai Abang.

\* This must be a later addition to the story.



Aku unggai alah bandong laban Lulong siduai Kumang.  
 Aku unggai alah telah laban Kalinah ti disebut Indai Abang.

"I wont be beaten compared with Lulong and Kumang.  
 "I wont be less spoken of than Kalinah who is called Indai Abang."

This precious ornament is variously described as a "lump of gold," a "lump of silver" and compared in the way of praise to various jungle fruits. A great consultation is held and inquiries made as to where this may be found. The old men are asked and they know not. The King of the Sea gives a like answer, neither do the birds above mentioned know where it is to be obtained. At length the grandfather of the bird Katupong recollects that he has seen it "afar off" in Nising's house. Nising is the grandfather of the Burong Malam\* (night bird.) All the sons-in-law set out at once for Nising's house. Arriving there they approach warily and listen clandestinely to what is going on inside; and they hear Nising's wife trying to sing a child to sleep. She carries it up and down the house, points out the fowls and pigs, &c. yet the child refuses to stop crying much to the mother's anger. "How can I but cry," the child says, "I have had a bad dream, wherein I thought I was bitten by a snake which struck me in the side, and I was cut through below the heart." "If so," answers the mother, "it signifies your life will not be a long one."

"Soon will your neck be stuck in the mud bank.

"Soon will your head be inclosed in *rotan-sega*.

"Soon will your mouth eat the cotton threads. †

"For this shadows forth that you are to be the spouse of Beragai's ‡ spear;" and much more in the same strain, but I will return to this again. After hearing this singing they go up into the house and make their request. Nising refuses to give them any of the ornaments, upon which they resort to stratagem. They get him to drink "*tuak*" until he becomes insensible when they snatch this precious jewel from his turban. Soon after Nising recovers, and finding out what has been done he blusters and strikes about wishing to kill right and left; but at length they pacify him telling him the precious ornament is wanted to take to a Gawè in the lower world, upon which he assents to their taking it away,

\* This is not a bird at all, but an insect which is often heard at night, and being used as an omen comes under the designation "Burong" as do also the deer and other creatures besides birds.

† This refers to cotton which in the feast is tied round the head.

‡ The name of a bird.

saying that he has many more where that came from. They start off homewards and come to their waiting father-in-law and deliver the "precious jewel" into the hands of his daughter, Dara Inchin Temaga.

Now this ornament, on account of which so much trouble and delay is undergone, is nothing else than a *human head*, either a mass of putrifying flesh, or a blackened charred skull. The high price and value of this ghastly trophy in Dyak estimation is marked by the many epithets which describe it, the trouble of obtaining it, and the being for whom it was sought, no less a person than the daughter of the great Singalang Burong. It shows how a Dyak woman of quality esteems the possession of it. This is that which shall make Dara Inchin more splendidly attired than her compeers Lulong and Kumang, themselves the ideal of Dyak feminine beauty. And moreover the story is a distinct assertion of that which has been often said, viz, that the women are at the bottom, the prime movers of head-taking in many instances; and how should they not be with the example of this story before them?

The meaning and application of the woman singing a child to sleep in Nising's house is the imprecation of a fearful curse on their enemies. The child which is carried up and down the house is simply metaphorical for a human head, which in the Gawè is carried about the house, and through it the curse of death is invoked upon its surviving associates. In the words I have quoted above their life is prayed to be short, their necks to rot in the mud, their mouths to be triumphed over and mocked, and their heads to be hung up in the conquerors' houses as trophies of victory. And this is but a very small part of the whole curse. It is this part of the song which is listened to with the greatest keenness and enjoyment, especially by the young who crowd round the performer at this part.

With this "ornament" in possession Singalang Burong and his followers set out for the lower world. On the way they pass through several mythical countries the names of which are given, and come to "*pintu langit*", of which "Grandmother Doctor" is the guardian, and see no way of getting through, it is so tight and firmly shut. The young men try their strength and the edge of their weapons to force a passage through, but to no purpose. In the midst of the noise the old "grandmother" herself appears and chides

her grandchildren for their unseemly conduct. She then with a turn of a porcupine quill opens the door and they pass through. Downward they go until they come to a certain projecting rock somewhere in the lower skies where they rest a while. Dara Inchin Temaga in wandering about sees the human world, the land and sea and the islands; upon which she describes the mouths of the various rivers of Sarawak.

The following may be given as specimens:—

Utè ti ludas ludas,  
Nya nonga Tebas;  
Ndor kitè rari ka bias,  
glombang nyadi.

Utè ti renjong renjong,  
Nya pulau Burong,  
Massin di tigong  
kapal api.

Utè ti ganjar ganjar,  
Nya nonga Laiar,  
Di pandang pijar,  
mata ari mati.

Utè ti linga linga.  
Nya nonga Kalaka,  
Menoa Malana  
ti maio bini.

Which may be rendered as follows:

“That which is like a widening expanse  
“Is the mouth of Tebas; (Moratebas)  
“Whither we run to escape the pattering waves.

“That which is high peaked,  
“Is the island of Burong;  
“Ever being passed by the fire ships.

“That which glistens white,  
“Is the mouth of the Laiar, (Saribus)  
“Lit up by the setting sun.

“That which heaves and rolls.  
“Is the mouth of Kalaka;  
“The country of Malana with many wives.”

Soon after this they come to the path which leads them to the house of Kling. As the whole of the performance is directed to the fetching and coming of Singalang Burong, naturally great effects follow upon his arrival, and such are described. As soon as he enters the house the paddy chests suddenly become filled, and any holes in wall or roof close themselves up, for he brings with him no lack of medicines and charms. His power over the sick and old is miraculous. "Old men having spoken with grandfather Lang become young again:—The dumb begin to stammer out speech. The blind see, the lame walk limpingly. Women with child are delivered of children as big as frogs." At a certain point the performer goes to the doorway of the house, and pretends to receive him with great honour, waving the sacrificial fowl over him. Singalang Burong is said to have the white hair of old age, but the face of a youth.

Now follows the closing scene of the ceremony called "*bedenjang*." The performer goes along the house beginning with the head man, touches each person in it, and pronounces an invocation upon him. In this he is supposed to personate Singalang Burong and his sons-in-law, who are believed to be the real actors. Singalang Burong himself "*nenjangs*" the headmen, and his sons-in-law the birds bless the rest. The touch of the human performer and the accompanying invocation are thought to effect a communication between these bird spirits from the skies, and each individual being. The great bird-chief and his dependents come from above to give men their charms and their blessings. Upon the men the performer invokes physical strength and bravery in war; and upon the women luck with paddy, cleverness in Dyak feminine accomplishments, and beauty in form and complexion.

This ceremony being over, the women go to Singalang Burong (in the house of Kling according to the Mengap) with "*tuak*" and make him drunk. When in a state of insensibility his turban drops off, and out of it falls the head which was procured as above related. Its appearance creates a great stir in the house, and Lulong and Kunang come out of the room and take it. After leaving charms and medicines behind him and asking for things in return, Singalang Burong and his company go back to the skies.

At the feast they make certain erections at regular intervals along the verandah of the house called "*pandong*" on which are hung their war-charms, and swords and spears, &c.

In singing the performer goes round these and along the "*ruai*." The recitation takes a whole night to complete; it begins about 6 p. m. in the evening and ends about 9 or 10 a. m. in the morning. The killing of a pig and examining the liver is the last act of the ceremony.

In Balau Dyak the word "Mengap" is equivalent to "Singing" or reciting in any distinctive tone, and is applied to Dyak song or Christian worship: but in Saribus dialect it is applied to certain kinds of ceremonial songs only.

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